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**The Navy's Role in
Promoting and Defending
U.S. National Interests**

A Speech Delivered by
Rear Admiral Joseph C. Strasser, USN

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Research Memorandum 5-95

U.S. Naval War College



UNITED STATES NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, Rhode Island

**THE NAVY'S ROLE IN PROMOTING AND DEFENDING
U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS**

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A speech delivered by
Rear Admiral Joseph C. Strasser, United States Navy

In the 1920s, Lord Rutherford declared, "We are short of money, therefore we must think." That is a fairly apt description of where all the Services find themselves today. If one accepts the figures recently announced by the General Accounting Office, the military will face, between now and the turn of century, a shortfall of up to 150 billion dollars. That \$150 billion represents a lot of "thought" and I tell my sponsors in Washington, DC, that Lord Rutherford was right — so don't cut my budget at the Naval War College! I cannot recall a period during my career where the need for new thoughts and new direction was so pressing.

However, I am not here today to talk to you about the Naval War College (although I'm bound to slip in the occasional unsolicited commercial). Rather, I would like to address the new *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*. Particularly, I want to concentrate on the Navy's role in supporting that strategy.

The basic tenets of America's *National Security Strategy* have remained stable and non-partisan because they are as well accepted and as non-controversial as motherhood — they include the protection of America's citizens, its interests, institutions and way of life. President Clinton has put his own imprimatur on the latest *National Security Strategy* by concentrating on America's engagement in the world and by calling for enlargement of the community of democratic states. Under this strategy the relative utility of naval forces increases as more bases abroad are closed and US service personnel are withdrawn.

The *National Security Strategy* addresses five major objectives for "maintaining a strong defense capability":

- Dealing with Major Regional Contingencies
- Providing a Credible Overseas Presence
- Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction
- Contributing to Multilateral Peace Operations, and
- Supporting Counterterrorism Efforts and Other National Security Objectives

I would particularly like to deal with three of these objectives: providing a credible overseas presence; contributing to multilateral peace operations; and dealing with major regional contingencies.

The President is committed to maintaining a "robust overseas presence in several forms, such as permanently stationed forces, deployments and combined exercises, port calls and other force visits, as well as military-to-military contacts."¹ The Navy has been in the business of providing forward presence in support of national objectives since it first sent ships to counter piracy in the Mediterranean and state-sponsored blackmail in the Caribbean in the early 1800s. Later in the century, the nation turned to the "cast iron commodore," Matthew Calbraith Perry, and his black ships to open up trade with Japan. In the infancy of this century, the nation again turned to the Navy to demonstrate US commitment and resolve, when President Theodore Roosevelt sailed the Great White Fleet around the world.² And for the past 50 years, "Haze gray and underway," has been the motto of sailors as they have continued this "historic and enduring purpose"³ of providing forward presence. As I speak, the Navy finds nearly half of its ships underway (with about 20 percent of them being on deployment), conducting exercises with nearly a dozen countries and making port visits to an additional dozen countries.

Maintaining this operational tempo is neither easy nor cheap. And the American taxpayer has the right to ask, is it worth the cost? Keeping ships forward deployed requires an enduring investment in operational readiness and sustainability at a time of significantly reduced defense spending. The costs of not doing so, however, are even greater. "The returns will be measured in:

- Deterrence of aggression
- Enhancement of regional stability
- Improvement of interoperability with key allies; and
- Readiness to provide a timely initial crisis response"⁴

Common sense confirms that the cost of conflict is immensely greater than the cost of deterrence. Were this not true, the President

would not have worked so hard and until the final hour to secure a peaceful solution to the Haiti crisis. *The underlying purpose of forward presence is to influence the perceptions and actions of foreign governments and other international actors in order to achieve national security without combat.* I do not mean to imply that forward presence is a substitute for political, diplomatic, or economic instruments of policy because it is not; but it does underwrite and strengthen them.

An important principle taught at the Naval War College, and one which has been confirmed again and again by history, is that a mismatch between national and military strategies inevitably reduces security and generally results in conflict. The *National Security Strategy* clearly delineates why America must remain engaged in the world if its interests are to be protected. Were we to try and support this strategy only using forces based in the United States — that is, using a surge strategy — a classic mismatch, with all its resulting risks, would occur.

Naval leadership in general, and Admiral Mike Boorda, the Chief of Naval Operations, in particular, are strongly opposed to a surge strategy for our forces. Under such a strategy, ships would have either to remain in port and on standby or be training in areas close to their home base ready to surge forward in times of crisis. Such a strategy places naval forces in the area too late to nip a crisis in the bud. Indeed, a lack of forward naval forces can invite adventurism by those who oppose America's interests in the world. The analogy most often used, and I think it is apt, is the cop on the beat versus the fireman in the firehouse. The cop on the beat knows his area, including the trouble spots, and can often prevent undesirable actions from occurring — and that ultimately saves the community scarce funds. The fireman, on the other hand, only reacts after a fire has started, often having to come from a considerable distance, and once on the scene he is primarily involved in controlling the spread of the fire and putting it out. Regardless of how well he does his job, damage is done. I risk implying from this analogy, but am not, that America should become a "world policeman." We neither desire nor can we afford that role. The "neighborhoods" we are interested in are those which directly impact our national interests. Thus, the Navy strongly supports the President's policy of engagement and its emphasis on forward deployments.

One part of America's overseas presence strategy in which the Naval War College is a major contributor is the military-to-military contacts program. Undoubtedly our greatest contribution comes from educating foreign officers in our Naval Command College and Naval Staff College. There are currently 46 serving Chiefs of Naval Staff around the globe who are graduates of these programs.

Another contribution which we initiated at the Naval War College, and one not so well known, is an exchange the US Navy has had with the Soviet (now Russian) and Royal Navies since 1990. What started out as cool, but frank, discussions of naval doctrine, have now evolved into simulations involving naval and marine peacekeeping operations. I have had the pleasure of heading the U.S. delegation for the past few talks. As one of only three JCS approved naval military-to-military contacts with the Russians, these talks form an extremely important part of the National Security Strategy.

They also provide an excellent segue into the next area I wish to discuss, contributing to multinational peace operations. Navies in general are playing an increasingly important role in multilateral peace operations.⁵ One reason is that the US Navy has worked hard to enlarge the community of navies with which it can operate. That we operated with 16 of our 18 maritime partners in the Gulf War coalition during the two years prior to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, attests to the value of our forward presence operations. The first steps the President took in dealing with the Haiti crisis were to establish an economic embargo and enlist maritime partners to help enforce it. Eventually, ships from Argentina, Britain, Canada, France, and the Netherlands participated. Over the years, the US Navy has exercised frequently with each of these nations' navies through bilateral, NATO and UNITAS exercises.

The importance of coalitions in both military and political terms cannot be overemphasized. Since naval operations can be both complex and dangerous, successfully assembling a maritime coalition depends in large measure on the confidence of participants that the required missions can be both effectively and safely completed. Our forward presence forces, which routinely operate with dozens of foreign navies, provide the foundation upon which trust and confidence are built. The Navy believes you must train as you fight. In 1993 alone, our fleets conducted 168 exercises with a total of 53 countries and it anticipates matching those figures this year.

The range of potential naval involvement in peace operations is wide. Today the oceans offer much potential for future conflict.⁶ Environmental degradation through uncontrolled waste disposal, increased reliance on fish protein to feed populations, disputes over marine resources, and territorial claims may be expected to escalate. In addition to these maritime matters, naval forces have a role to play in disputes which are centered ashore. Since the end of the Cold War, maritime patrols and interception forces have been placed around Iraq, Haiti, in the Adriatic and on the Danube; naval forces in the river deltas of Cambodia have conducted nation-building tasks; forward staging bases were established off the coast of Somalia; and peace meetings have been conducted at sea off the coast of Bosnia.

The conflict in the Balkans has been exclusively centered on land; yet deployment of aircraft carriers to the region by France, Britain and the United States enabled these countries to transmit clear and unambiguous signals of concern for the safety of land forces without further destabilizing the precarious humanitarian relief operations ashore. They have also helped control escalation in the conflict through flight restrictions on Serbia aircraft as part of *Operation Deny Flight*.

These are but a few examples which illustrate the versatility of naval forces in contributing to missions which fall short of warfighting. The reach, flexibility and potential of modern warships, which includes their ability to poise, monitor, and project power and their capacity to amass, intervene or withdraw, means they are often the first force used in crises.

Those who would challenge America's interests should remember, however, that even while a naval vessel is conducting such benign work as a diplomatic visit, it will have its magazines full, its complete suite of weapons and sensors available and most likely its wartime complement of personnel onboard. This lack of intrusiveness, or "small footprint" to use the current idiom, is further enhanced by the fact that outside another state's territorial waters (generally recognized as being 12 miles), warships have freedom of movement while within territorial waters they have certain minimum rights of innocent passage.

The Navy recognizes in most future crises it will not go it alone. In addition to fighting side by side with the other U.S. Services, the

Navy, as noted earlier, expects to operate with other navies. Ultimately, the true test for a nation's armed forces is how well they perform in combat — for that is the real purpose of the military, to defeat those who choose to challenge the United States using armed forces.

This leads me to the final national objective for military forces which I would like to discuss — dealing with major regional contingencies. Following the end of the Cold War, the Naval Service published a white paper entitled . . . *From the Sea* which provided its vision of how naval forces would be used in the future. It correctly forecast that the near term future would see the Navy fighting primarily in the world's littorals. Simultaneously, it recognized the possibility (perhaps even the inevitably) that a peer competitor would emerge. Keeping this in mind is critical when deciding how the future Navy will be structured and employed. Had the Navy dismissed the possibility of an emerging competitor, it would have started down the road to acquiring vessels tailored only for the near-shore environment. Instead . . . *From the Sea* encourages retaining an open ocean (or blue water) capability as a hedge against the unforeseen and rapid emergence of a competing nation. Thus, the US Navy is not going to relinquish its ability to protect shipping and keep sea lines of communication open. Admiral Boorda has stressed his commitment to a maintaining a "balanced force" which will meet both present and potential challenges.

When fighting does begin, the Navy, with embarked Marines, is likely to be the first force there and the last force to leave. Since it is likely to be the first force to respond, the Navy/Marine Corps team has a special role in preparing the theater for the introduction of the heavier forces provided by the Army and Air Force. The Navy is studying ways to enhance its performance of this role. Of note are its efforts to protect arriving forces from theater ballistic missiles such as the SCUD used by Iraq in the Gulf War. By positioning an anti-ballistic missile defense ship in the proximity of a port of debarkation, the Navy will be able to protect both personnel and equipment arriving in theater (including the arrival of land-based anti-ballistic systems). When other forces are in place, the Navy will fight shoulder to shoulder with them. In addition, its supporting role will be critical since sealift brings the vast majority of equipment and supplies into the theater.

One area of concern for the Department of Defense is the *National Security Strategy*'s requirement to support two "nearly simultaneous" major regional contingencies. Although confident of its ability to respond to a single major contingency, simulations and research conducted to date indicate there will be some shortfalls, particularly in airlift and sealift, if required to respond to two. In addition, programmed force levels are pushing against the requirements to meet this challenge. As an example, since only 11 active (plus 1 reserve) aircraft carriers are available at the turn of the century, every carrier in the inventory will be necessary to meet force requirements based on past trends. Historically, 4 to 6 carriers have responded to major contingencies. That means 8-12 carriers (basically our entire inventory) would be needed to support two simultaneous conflicts, but at least two of our carriers can always be expected to be in overhaul. Their inability to respond to either of the contingencies would jeopardize the chances of success and increase the risks to US personnel. The same holds true for amphibious ready groups which are also forecast to have shortfalls.

I do not mean to raise undue concerns or paint a dark picture of the future. I believe the future remains bright. The Navy will remain the most potent force afloat, manned by the brightest and most talented sailors in the world. Naval leadership is committed to maintaining high readiness and providing the best possible force structure within budget constraints. The challenges that lie ahead evoke more excitement than anxiety. Few generations are faced with the opportunities we have before us to shape our own destiny. Shakespeare was right when he penned, "Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt."⁷ Those of us at the Naval War College are proud of our role in helping shape and secure America's future. I take great pride in noting, for example, that the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Boorda, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Carl Mundy, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Shalikashvili, and the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Robert Kramek, are all graduates of the Naval War College. And the leaders I am now seeing at the Naval War College are no less talented. That is why I face the future with hope and confidence.

Outside of the Secretary of Defense's Pentagon office hangs a picture to which he often refers. It is the picture of a serviceman and his family praying in church prior to their being separated by a long deployment. Below the painting is a passage from Isaiah in which the Lord asks, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for me?" And Isaiah's reply is, "Here

am I. Send me." The men and women of the Navy, in service to our nation, routinely answer that call. Their "Here am I. Send me" attitude permeates our resolve to remain forward deployed and ready to meet the call to action, whenever and wherever that call may come.

Notes

1. Bill Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, DC: The White House, July 1994), pp. 7-8.
2. The Fleet's journey lasted from 1907-1909 and most of that time was under the command of Rear Admiral Charles Sperry, later a President of the Naval War College.
3. Rear Admiral Philip A. Dur, "Presence: Forward, Ready, Engaged," *Proceedings*, June 1994, p. 41.
4. Dur, *op. cit.* at note 3.
5. Many of the comments which follow are drawn *verbatim et liberatim* from CDR D.L.W. Sim's Strategic Research Department Report 8-94, *Men of War for Missions of Peace: Naval Forces in Support of United Nations Resolutions*.
6. Many of the ideas contained in this section are elaborated in CDR D.L.W. Sim, Royal Navy, *Men of War for Missions of Peace: Naval Forces in Support of United Nations Resolutions*, Research Report 8-94 (Newport: Naval War College, Strategic Research Department, 1994).
7. Measure for Measure, act I, scene 5.